

# An Interactive Policy Process Against Poverty

Researchers and policymakers in Senegal create home-grown strategies

*Like most countries in sub-Saharan Africa, Senegal has struggled unsuccessfully to provide a better life for the majority of its people. Now a new approach to the underlying issues of poverty offers hope for policies that will finally bring about real change.*

Senegal is among the poorest countries in the world. In the past decade the proportion of the country's population living below the poverty line has increased from about one-third to more than half. A 2001 survey estimated that two-thirds of the people were "poor." In the rural areas that number increases to about 80%. Grim statistics indeed for a nation of 10 million that had high hopes when it became independent from France in 1962.

Evidence of the economic problems surfaced in the 1980s. Low economic growth, strong internal demand, instability in public finances, and a chronic balance-of-payments deficit combined to bring about a serious deterioration in the quality of life for many Senegalese. A short-lived federation with neighbouring Gambia never fully got off the ground: the union was dissolved in 1989.

In the 1990s the Government of Senegal attempted to turn things around, launching an ambitious economic reform program with tough measures that included devaluing its currency and dismantling price controls and subsidies. The reform program produced results – from 1995 to 2001 the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) grew at an annual rate of 5%, and inflation declined.

On the other side of the ledger, however, the number of poor people continued to rise despite the increases in GDP. Seventy percent of the workforce is employed in agriculture, and this sector remained stubbornly stagnant despite the support of the international donor community. Industrial development and the private sector have not expanded as envisioned.

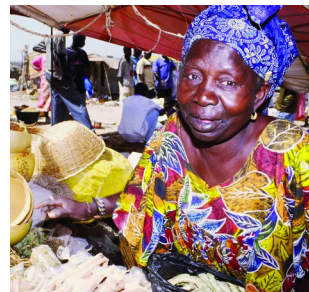
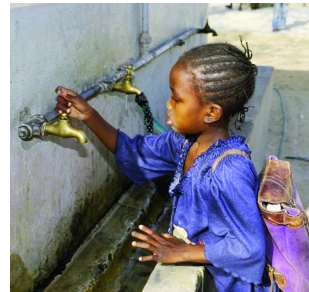
## The MIMAP approach

As has been seen in many of the world's least developed countries, poverty is a complex and persistent problem that is not easily eliminated. Increases in GDP do not automatically translate into improvements in the lives of the poor. To design programs that will alleviate or even eliminate poverty, economists and policymakers first need to understand the root causes of the problem, and how the poor are affected by government's economic strategies. Or indeed, if they are affected at all.

Providing answers to those kinds of questions is the role of the Micro Impacts of Macroeconomic and Adjustment Policies (MIMAP) program. The program was created in 1989 by Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and now comprises a network of a dozen countries in Asia and Africa (*see sidebar*). Senegal is a recent member of the MIMAP network.

IDRC had been active in Senegal since the 1980s. One of the institutions it had been supporting, the Centre de recherches économiques appliquées (CREA) was chosen to undertake the MIMAP-Senegal research. This brought about a notable change, according to Dr Abdoulaye Diagne, who is the director of CREA and was appointed coordinator of the MIMAP program in Senegal. "Previously, Senegalese academics did not work on poverty," he says. "Many studies were done, but by foreign consultants. Thanks to MIMAP our institute was able to carry out research on poverty."

The MIMAP-Senegal program is one of a number of projects selected by IDRC's Evaluation Unit for study to determine how effective the project has been in influencing policy and policymakers. The study report, prepared for IDRC by Tracy Tuplin is based on an original document by Kirit Parikh and points out that, at the time MIMAP-Senegal was getting



## The MIMAP Network: Promoting Innovation and Understanding

Specifically the MIMAP programs aims to:

- ❑ Enhance the research capacity of developing countries to analyze the impact of macroeconomic policies on their citizens;
- ❑ Provide new instruments for policy and program design and analysis by developing rigorously analytical tools and poverty monitoring systems;
- ❑ Assist the development of community-based monitoring and local development mechanisms;
- ❑ Strengthen the ability of policymakers to negotiate with international players such as the banks and other multilateral and bilateral organizations;
- ❑ Bring together researchers, politicians, government officials, and NGOs in policy dialogue at the national and regional levels; and
- ❑ Promote the exchange of research knowledge, tools, results, and policy dialogue among countries, institutions, and donors.

For more information visit [www.idrc.ca/mimap](http://www.idrc.ca/mimap)



underway, a second event occurred that had a significant impact on the original project design.

The project had barely started when Dr Diagne was made aware of the country's requirement to produce a comprehensive Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, or PRSP. This paper was a requirement to determine Senegal's eligibility for the Initiative for the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) led by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to alleviate debt and benefit from new loans. To be eligible, a country must submit a proposal on how the various national actors intend to use newly available funds to reduce poverty.

Just three months into the MIMAP project, CREA was selected as the technical partner of the Ministry of Economics and Finance to develop the PRSP. The goal was for the paper to reflect a consensus among government bodies, local experts, development partners, and civil society organizations. Given the pivotal role of CREA, it was inevitable that there would be considerable overlap between the two initiatives – MIMAP and PRSP.

Dr Diagne sees it as pure serendipity. "We produced a document that served as the launch pad for the consultative process leading to drafting the PRSP," he says. "The barriers fell very quickly, and we now have joint teams involving our researchers and those of the administration. Now it's as if there is no one involved but ourselves. I don't see consultants any more."

### The turning point

MIMAP-Senegal began in June 2000 with the overall objective of improving CREA's capacity for research that would lead to better understanding the microeconomic effects of macroeconomic decisions and how they impact on poverty issues. The CREA research team of 10 included professors and doctoral students from CREA, as well as representatives from the Bureau of Statistics. They had four specific goals:

- ❑ Construct a profile of poverty in Senegal and develop a monitoring system;
- ❑ Develop tools to analyze the impact of macroeconomic policies on income distribution;
- ❑ Study poor people's access to financial services, the gender dimension of poverty, and the relationship between education and poverty; and
- ❑ Encourage dialogue among development actors (researchers, policymakers, NGOs, and financiers) in the fight against poverty.

In November 2000, seven members of the CREA team attended a workshop on poverty analysis. This was the turning point, according to Tuplin who writes:

"To a large extent the originally planned MIMAP activities were put on the back burner. The bottom line is that the PRSP process made active use of CREA data and studies –

a contribution that was praised on a number of counts. The PRSP recommendations are based on CREA findings, illustrating the importance of the work in influencing policy, particularly in Senegal's poverty reduction strategy."

The report adds that CREA's help ensured that the PRSP document was written by Senegalese, establishing ownership that is expected to make implementation easier. In fact, CREA's collaboration with various government ministries brought about an important change in the policy community. "Before the PRSP, national researchers were largely ignored by policymakers and economic policy research was directed primarily by staff of the World Bank and the IMF ... the involvement of national researchers in the PRSP is a critical case of change in the policy community."

The fact that several of the CREA team members were also public administrators resulted in a policy process that was much more interactive – it became a two-way process. Not only did the administration make their needs known, now they were also advised by the researchers as to what was needed. And after decisions were made the researchers continued to be involved in monitoring and evaluating the results.

"Perhaps the most striking aspect of this policy influence," Tuplin writes, "is the fact that it was unintended. While the final result was likely more than the project hoped to achieve, there was a sense of apology that the MIMAP team was not able to keep to the original calendar of activities as planned at the outset of the project."

## Types of policy influence

Despite that "sense of apology," Tuplin reasons that the MIMAP project has achieved most of its original goals to a greater or lesser extent. Expanding policy capacity was a key element of the original proposal. This was achieved through a number of training events as well as the development of a Computable General Equilibrium (CGE) model. This is an analytical tool to help monitor and analyze the impact of macroeconomic policies on poverty. Development of the model required a review of available poverty data, and resulted in new and more relevant national data on poverty.

Several government officials commented on the impact of the project. Daouda Gueye, with the Ministry of Education's Office of General and Economic Administration, noted that CREA's continuing requests for information forced some government departments to improve their information collection methods in order to be able to provide what was needed. Also, Thierno Niane, coordinator of the Cell to Fight Poverty in the Ministry of Economy and Finance, commented that the project was able to "work on the levers that work in Senegal to understand which ones do work in order to better identify the links between economic growth and poverty reduction."

Tuplin adds that visibility and trust grew with the research. "The team became known for its abilities, establishing CREA as a credible research centre for government work. The researchers trained within the framework of the MIMAP project are now considered as being among the most qualified resource persons in the region."

The report points out that the MIMAP project also broadened policy horizons for a wide range of people – from students and researchers to economic planners and administrators, as well as donors. Even researchers and administrators who are no longer associated with the MIMAP project continue to work on other initiatives in the fight against poverty in Senegal using the experience and contacts they have gained.

In terms of the project's effect on policy regimes, Tuplin states that it was key in redefining research-policy linkages in the country. "Before the project, the Senegalese administration did not have the habit of integrating researchers, except for the occasional consultancy. Collaborative efforts here resulted in recognition that researchers increase the quality and speed of the work and of the team. This in itself translates into a new framework for collaboration."

## Factors affecting policy influence

Key people are a significant factor in affecting policy influence, and Tuplin has praise for CREA's Dr Diagne as project leader, as well as others who played important roles in the MIMAP-PRSP project. However, the report also points out that "In Africa, human capacity is overextended ... national experts are too few in number, creating a bottleneck in the supply-and-demand chain. This affects not only the quality of work but also presents problems for institution building."





Dissemination of research was seen as less critical in the PRSP-MIMAP project than in some other research programs, although there were numerous activities aimed at communicating more effectively and reaching a broader audience. For example, CREA organized a “Day of Reflection on the Economy of Senegal,” which was very well received by policymakers.

Tuplin writes that, because it was interactive, the research had direct access to policy circles. “Dissemination as a concept has a passive connotation that is contrasted with how mainstream MIMAP-Senegal became. Policymakers were a standing constituency of MIMAP as MIMAP unfolded into PRSP. This is in stark contrast to other research projects that are particularly dependent on dissemination to reach policymakers.”

Institutional issues also affect policy regimes. Although institution building was not an IDRC policy, at the time it was felt that support through CREA could eventually have a significant impact in the region. Tuplin reports that this was an

investment that is paying off, adding however that some believe CREA should have more formal links to government. To date, the links are informal and personal, with government researchers involved in MIMAP activities as experts but not as representatives of their ministries.

CREA’s director, Dr Diagne, is attempting to establish some institutional arrangements to sustain partnerships. As an example, he cites a three-year contract with the Ministry of Education to conduct a number of studies and prepare a report. There is also the possibility that CREA-MIMAP could serve as the research base for activities related to the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD).

Ultimately, Tuplin concludes, “the most striking aspect of the project is that the PRSP was not part of MIMAP’s original landscape. A number of internal and external factors created a significant policy window that was critical in joining these two efforts, and making the result so successful.”

### Some Lessons

- ❑ Flexibility is essential – in this case in accepting the opportunity to work on the PRSP rather than the planned MIMAP outputs.
- ❑ Linking the project to a specific policy process created a favourable environment for the work to be translated into concrete policies.
- ❑ Institutional support is sometimes necessary to create greater visibility, which leads to improved credibility and interaction with policymakers.
- ❑ Data that is compiled by competent national experts, rather than foreign consultants, results in a greater sense of ownership and improved implementation.

**The International Development Research Centre (IDRC)** is a Canadian public corporation, created to help developing countries find solutions to the social, economic, and natural resource problems they face. Support is directed to building an indigenous research capacity. Because influencing the policy process is an important aspect of IDRC’s work, in 2001 the Evaluation Unit launched a strategic evaluation of more than 60 projects in some 20 countries to examine whether and how the research it supports influences public policy and decision-making. The evaluation design and studies can be found at: [www.idrc.ca/evaluation/policy](http://www.idrc.ca/evaluation/policy)